

Observations and insights into captive wildfowl in the UK



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- The 4 BIG ISSUES
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- Species for concern

Legislative News:

- As of 1/1/16 the EU Invasive Non-native Species directive (INNS) made the breeding and acquisition of North American Ruddy ducks illegal. When the current stock perish, the species will terminate in captivity.
- DEFRA now requires all institutions to prove UK species are captive bred. Mandarin and Carolina are on the British list, but are not on the waiver derogation list under the general license. Institutions must apply for a license to trade them. All must be closed rung.
- DEFRA classified pinioning as a mutilation, and as such it needs to be performed by a Veterinary surgeon. BIAZA has highlighted that the definition is anticipated never to be over-turned. It is illegal for a non-veterinarian to perform the surgery; trained or not.
- UK to EU transportation guidelines now consider ducks (not geese or swans) to be poultry (used to be exotic wildfowl). To travel into the EU they need to be tested for salmonella and given full haematology and bacterial tests. With clear results and a vet check they can travel for 30 days from the date the test was carried out.
- WWT has to be above board. Anything else that is happening is either ignorance, deliberate ignorance or ignorance of the outcomes.

WWT and Welfare:

As an international conservation charity WWT needs to set a precedent regarding best welfare practice. We have an on-site Veterinary health officer able to provide immediate treatment and post-mortem results for both our captive collection and wild reserve. We also have 2 vets spread over 6 days which help over-see all of our WWT centres.

- We will only exchange birds with organisations and individuals who have a vet certificate for their birds.
- We will only exchange birds with organisations and individuals who have a best practice facility for their birds.
- We provide appropriate transport certifications for all birds moved from inside and outside WWT.
- We perform all tests required for transport inside and outside of WWT.
- We provide all paperwork required for captive birds.



Avicultural observations:

Bird exchange obstacle course:

- Fewer birds are being kept
- Fewer birds are being exchanged
- Fewer species are being kept
- Fewer birds are being bred
- Decrease in genetic diversity
- Decrease in interest
- **The fact is, if people cannot move stock on they will not aim to breed their birds**

Concerns:

- Aviculture will be pushed underground
- Species will be hoarded and diversity lost
- Escapes will increase due to bad management of fully-flighted birds
- Birds could be kept against best welfare standards
- Bad management could exacerbate the pinioning situation with DEFRA

Zoo Sector:

UK Zoos tend to keep wildfowl as an “extra” point of interest in a pre-existing exhibit. These species are often predictable as they need to fit a regular zoo exhibit niche.

Most UK zoos are now BALAI approved. This means that they have achieved a set of criteria which allows them to move designated animals between other BALAI institutions with minimal testing.



Zoo Sector:

If there are excess birds on the BIAZA surplus list, zoos will often put the species concerned on the non-breeding list within their collection plan for the coming year.

Collection planning in zoos is often very clean cut, and cannot be manipulated to benefit species at short notice.

BALAI approval regulations require 30 day quarantine periods for birds and eggs from non-BALAI zoos.



Zoo Sector:

Media coverage in zoos can be exceptionally beneficial to species of concern due to their varied appeal.

Zoos can also attract negative attention to captive birds due to the “anti-zoo” attitude in the UK at present.

Numerous UK zoos now have an anti-pinioning policy.



Zoo Sector:

The 4 BIG ISSUES:

1. Misidentification
2. Hybridisation
3. Non-breeding
4. Genetic bottlenecks

Wildfowl specialists are not so common as soft bill specialists etc.



Zoo Sector:

Species for concern:

- Subspecies
- Middle of the road
- Already rare in captivity
- Little brown jobs
- Large swans
- Large geese
- Similar aythya
- Aggressive teal





What is it?

- The Zoological Information Management System (**ZIMS**) is the current ISIS software which is used by over 600 members around the world. **ZIMS** incorporates ARKS and in 2014 will incorporate MedARKS into a web-based real-time database that allows instantaneous access to data from all ISIS zoos and aquarium members

What can it do?

- World species holding
- World population overviews
- Display any data you want to input
- Often misleading regards species quality
- Collections not always 100% up-to-date
- Some institutions cannot afford it



Private Sector:

- Private individuals often have a culture of secrecy
- Possibly due to a fear of theft or discovery
- Lower level of quality control due to representation of assets
- ‘Word of mouth’ the only form of insurance of quality (no ZIMS)

Business VS Conservation



Private Sector:

- Fashion plays a huge part in what people keep and what they breed
- Non-desirable species do not make money
- Aggressive species make housing a variety of species difficult
- Required turnover means fewer of the large species are being bred
- Time constraints play a huge part in species decisions...



Private Sector:

- *Coloured wildfowl are desirable*
- They do nothing to help conservation
- They are inbred and increase mortality rates
- They are recessive and can be accidentally mixed into pure lines
- They limit the space available for the “real thing”
- They can glamorise bird keeping in an undesirable way



Private Sector:

Species concern: Little brown jobs!

- Black ducks
- Bronze wings
- Abyssinian blue wing
- Brown teal
- Cape shoveler
- Plumed whistling
- White-winged
- Swans
- Geese

BIG ISSUES:

- Universally:
- Misidentification
 - Hybridisation
 - Genetic representation
 - Non-breeding



Trends:

- Some private individuals currently intentionally breeding and keeping hybrids
- Hybrid management often poor
- Coloured wildfowl flooding the market
- Less room for the big swans and geese

Modern UK species heroes:

Leigh Catherick: Wild Muscovies

- Thought they were beautiful
- Started in 2000
- Bought every bird he could find in the UK – found 7 pairs
- No distance too far
- Designed purpose-built aviaries
- Selectively bred for 8 years
- Home made breeding programme
- Removed any which had throwbacks
- Shared to numerous zoos and collections
- Changed common belief on species temperament
- Did it for the love of it!

Leigh Catherick: White-winged duck

- Thought they were beautiful
- Contacted a Dutch breeder to buy 2:2
- Discovered their price and rarity but bought them anyway
- Bred 17 in the first year
- Exchanged with WWT
- Exchanged with other breeders
- Aimed to keep them in the UK for UK breeders
- Sold them at a loss – undercut market
- Did it properly with a vet
- Did the paperwork properly, all birds with A10s and closed rings
- Did it for the love of it!

Roger Cattermole: Pygmy geese

- Indian, Green and African kept
- Purpose-built best-practice aviaries
- Innovative designs
- Constant pursuit of perfection
- Shares birds far and wide in both the Zoo and Private sector
- Exceptionally tidy
- Emphasis on quality habitat
- Thorough understanding of species needs
- Has fantastic “bird-sense”
- Considers Aviculture a “privileged hobby”
- Open and informative about skills and techniques

What do you think? Bill...

Issues for approaching wildfowl continuation:

1. There are young breeders! Find out via Facebook and social media. The old organisations are not up to date and attract very few Avicultural followers
2. Pinioning – it has driven Aviculture underground, as prosecutions could be a nightmare
3. Auctions show that there are a lot of people doing it, 100's of people regularly buying and keeping wildfowl
4. Censusing – A classic blast from the past. People are different now, showy, prepared to tell you what they've got?
5. Historical reputations – it's time to re-write them. Lets forget about the past and work together
6. Focus on value - giving people species to hold gives them no motivation to breed them
7. Need to harness them with an online forum for captive advice and sharing info
8. Share more than just photos
9. Professional side needs to be accessible, update the outdated written information

What do you think? Charles...

- Aim is to have one pair of almost everything
- The nursery is under vet supervision on all pinioning from 2016. Legitimises affairs. Offering a local 'open house' policy for neighbouring breeders to help take the pressure off
- Birds get reared in the shop where people can see them up close
- Birds are fed in a replicatory way. A clever move to guarantee success post-move
- 2016 output of 2800+ closed rings
- Buyer research important, tailors recommended bird species to facilities
- Young people in the hobby: wanting hybrids for fun = bad management
- 2016 captive rares: Baers, Lesser scaup, Euro Eiders this year, viable unrelated stock
- Wants: Pink ears ordered, Frecks ordered, excited!
- Aggressive species should be with WWT! He thinks it doesn't work for the private sector!
- Need to create bonds and connections with other organisation to take the pressure off the regular species

What do you think? Mo...

- Large property owners, indulgent hobby, little bit of breeding, some swapping, but mostly local and non challenging. Money is not an issue for them, puts you in a bit of a position if you breed and sell to pay for your hobby
- Nationally a few people doing single species ponds, Ringed teal etc. not normally in the BWA - usually have 1 contact
- Something to be done with modernising the approach - Billy's right
- Young folk have too many other things to distract them - don't stick with it
- Wildfowlers with a generational problem make the hobby outdated
- Pinioned wildfowl as a hobby will become outdated and aviaries will become the norm
- Species selection will become limited
- Use the talk to consider the future - use enthusiasm to move them to act - everyone at the meeting is potentially another Peter Scott
- Less exposure to the natural world - more exposure to opinions that are anti-captivity
- Look to convincing WWT that we need to orchestrate keeping all Red list species on site and organising associates accordingly

What do you think? Leigh...

“I’ve always been a bit oddball. Most people keep birds to make money; nothing about conservation, or just for the interest of a fantastic species.

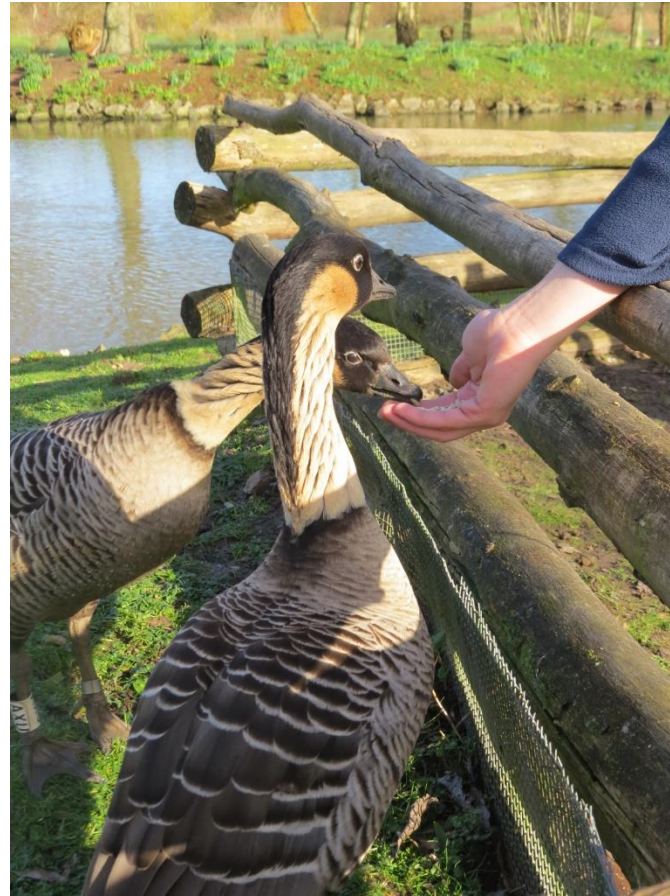
As you know I keep Greylag geese, I have 26 birds not worth a dime but I get great pleasure watching them.

Definitely if it can help inspire young people to do the same I’m well with you there.

So many species need our help as **man kind has a lot to answer for, so every little bit helps**, many thanks for your kind words.”

Predictions for the future:

- WWT species holding will change
- Many species will no longer be represented by WWT
- Europe will soon become the hub of Aviculture as a hobby
- Some species WILL be lost completely
- There is still time for several species to be recovered



Proposals and ideas:

Social Media

- Create a trans-Atlantic Facebook page for genuine Avicultural information sharing. Aimed at private and zoo keepers. Rigorously managed for quality of purpose. Multiple contributors on a scheduled post basis

Alliances

- Promote multi-organisational alliances to benefit rare species breeding. Create an unofficial studbook keeper for species rare in captivity, supported by the IWWA

Breeding alliances

- Promote multi-organisational alliances for the incubation and rearing of unwanted eggs. Focus on red-list species first, captive rarities second

Many thanks!



RIP Jerry – The last New Zealand Blue duck in captivity.